

Not too long ago, two cowboys came by my house in the night. They'd been over in San Angelo reworking the trails that their breed was working decades ago. The reason they stopped at the house was to apply for a loan. As they explained, banking facilities weren't available to handle their business. The opening and closing hours of the money jugs were in conflict with their coming and going hours. A matter, I'd like to add, that should be brought to the attention of the State Banking Commission. Ranchers everywhere could get more sleep if shearing capitans and waddies had an all night loan officer to handle their financial needs.

It was difficult for me to process their application. To keep them in listening range, you needed a special radar set that'd hold a beam on a zigzagging course. Climatic conditions in the wool capital are such that the evening air makes cowboys unsteady on their feet. City ordinances ought to force the owners of the watering spots to depollute the atmosphere in their joints. Country boys flat can't breathe tavern fog without suffering nocturnal dizzy spells.

Their boss was to blame for them being broke. Much earlier in the day, he'd let them out with only \$20 apiece to get their hair cut. Spiro Agnew's speech writers can make better jokes than that. In these inflated times, a double ten spot won't buy a round of snow cones at a discount house, much less take care of a barber's bill and a few drams to ward off dandruff and scalp poison.

As a matter of fact, one of their secondary problems was neglecting to get their hair cut. They said that by the time they'd worked their way up the street to the barber shop, credit terms had stiffened to the point that they didn't think their boss would want them running up any barber work that had to be paid for on a lay-away plan.

The rest of the story was hard to keep straight, because the oldest of the lot started bucking around my yard, squawling that he was a curley headed wolf that was too wild to sit in a barber's chair. If he hadn't run over a bicycle he would have put on the best show that neighborhood had ever seen. I'd still like to see what he could have done with a bell tied on his flank.

Back in the days when the two great western story tellers, Frank Dobie and Eugene Rhodes, were cowhands, they probably told their bosses that they had to go to town to get their hair cut. Though they could weave the charm of leather and horses into authentic word pictures, chances are they used the same excuse to go to the lights. Barber ships have long made good alibi poles for herders; after more than hundred years, you'd think they would have found a more original tale.